

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9184
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
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AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 10443

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINR, GW
SUBJECT: GERHART BAUM TO SUCCEED MAIHOFFER AS FRG INTER-
IOR MINISTER

REF: (A) BONN 10216, (B) BONN 10345

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BEGIN SUMMARY. MAIHOFFER'S SUDDEN DEPARTURE AND PROSPEC-
TIVE REPLACEMENT BY GERHART BAUM ARE ONLY FIRST STEPS ON
A LONG ROAD WHICH THE FDP MUST TRAVEL, AFTER ITS DEBACLE
IN THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS. MAIHOFFER'S EXIT REMOVES SOME
FRICTION BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES WHICH FORM THE SCHMIDT
COALITION. HOWEVER, MANY OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH BROUGHT
MAIHOFFER DOWN REMAIN TO CONFRONT BAUM, A MAN WITH GOOD

POTENTIAL BUT LITTLE TESTING ON THE HARD ISSUES WHICH AN INTERIOR MINISTER MUST FACE. BAUM'S GRACE PERIOD MAY LAST THROUGH THE SUMMER. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FRG HAS ANNOUNCED THAT GERHART RUDOLF BAUM, ONE OF TWO PARLIAMENTARY STATE SECRETARIES IN THE INTERIOR MINISTRY, WILL SUCCEED WERNER MAIHOFFER, WHO RESIGNED AS MINISTER YESTERDAY. BAUM WAS NOT THE FIRST CHOICE FOR THIS JOB. HE GOT THE NOD ONLY AFTER MORE PROMINENT CANDIDATES HAD DECLINED OR BEEN REJECTED. IN THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS WE DISCUSS WHAT MAIHOFFER'S EXIT AND BAUM'S ENTRANCE MEAN FOR THE FDP AND FOR THE SCHMIDT GOVERNMENT.

EXIT MAIHOFFER

2. MAIHOFFER'S POLITICAL BLUNDERS AND HIS IMAGE AS A WELL-INTENTIONED BUT INCOMPETENT MINISTER HAD LITTLE TO DO WITH THE MASSIVE DEFEATS WHICH HIS PARTY SUFFERED IN THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS IN HAMBURG AND LOWER SAXONY (REF. A). HIS DEPARTURE THUS DOES NOT REMOVE THE OBJECTIVE DIFFICULTIES WHICH BROUGHT THE FDP DOWN. IT IS ONLY THE FIRST OF MANY PAINFUL STEPS WHICH THE FDP MUST NOW CONTEMPLATE.

3. THOUGH THE ABRUPTNESS OF MAIHOFFER'S RESIGNATION
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CAUGHT MANY BY SURPRISE, IT WAS NO SECRET THAT HIS TIME AS MINISTER WAS RAPIDLY RUNNING OUT. SEVERAL FACTORS BROUGHT ON MAIHOFFER'S DECISION TO RESIGN NOW. HE SENSED A MASSIVE EROSION OF SUPPORT IN ALL LEVELS OF HIS PARTY. FOR MONTHS, HE HAD BEEN A TARGET OF CRITICISM FROM MANY SEGMENTS OF THE FDP, WHO FELT THAT HIS PERFORMANCE AS INTERIOR MINISTER HAD BECOME INEPT AND HAD BETRAYED THEIR TRUST, AND WHO HAD BEEN CALLING ON HIM TO STEP DOWN. THE FDP LEADERSHIP WAS ALSO ABANDONING HIM. FDP CHAIRMAN HANS DIETRICH GENSCHER'S SUPPORT HAD LONG BEEN LUKEWARM. SHORTLY AFTER THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS, FDP VICE CHAIRMAN GRAF LAMBSDORFF PUBLICLY SAID THAT HIS PARTY WOULD HAVE TO DRAW "PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES" AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. HE COULD ONLY HAVE MEANT MAIHOFFER.

4. THE HAPLESS MINISTER HAD ALSO BECOME A BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE FDP AND THE SPD. MANY IN THE SPD WERE VOCALLY UNHAPPY THAT THE FEBRUARY 3 CABINET RESHUFFLE HAD SACKED THEIR SPD COLLEAGUES, WHILE SPARING MAIHOFFER WHOSE TROUBLES OVER THE PAST YEAR MADE HIM A PRIME CANDIDATE FOR REPLACEMENT. RECENTLY,

A GROUP OF SPD DEPUTIES--INCLUDING MOST OF THE
FAMOUS "DISSIDENTS" IN THE FRAKTION--BEGAN A PUBLIC
CAMPAIGN TO FORCE MAIHOFFER OUT, ON THE GROUNDS THAT HE
HAD FAILED TO CONTROL ACTIVITIES OF THE FEDERAL
BORDER POLICE (BGS) WHICH--IN THEIR VIEW--VIOLATED THE
CIVIL RIGHTS OF PERSONS CROSSING FRG BORDERS. MAIHOFFER
MADE A LAME DEFENSE AGAINST THESE CHARGES, EVEN

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THOUGH THE CHANCELLOR AGREED WITH HIS VIEW THAT COALI-
TION RELATIONS WERE ILL-SERVED BY PUBLIC WRANGLES OF

THIS KIND. STILL, MAIHOFFER FACED THE PROSPECT OF TOUGH
BUNDESTAG GRILLING, ABOVE ALL FROM HIS DISENCHANTED SPD
COLLEAGUES, ON WHAT THE BGS HAD DONE. HIS DEPARTURE
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THUS WEAKENS, BUT DOES NOT REMOVE, A POINT OF FRICTION
BETWEEN THE COALITION PARTIES.

ENTER BAUM

5. WE HAVE HEARD PRIVATELY, AND THE PRESS NEVER TIRES
OF REPEATING, THAT SCHMIDT IN PAST YEARS HAS NOT HELD
BAUM IN HIGH REGARD. THERE IS A NATURAL DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE TWO MEN: AN AGGRESSIVE, FORCEFUL SCHMIDT
AND A REFLECTIVE, SOMEWHAT DELIBERATE BAUM. WHATEVER
ANTIPATHIES MAY HAVE EXISTED IN THE PAST, WE DOUBT THEY
WILL IMPAIR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHANCELLOR AND
HIS NEW INTERIOR MINISTER. BOTH MEN HAVE TOO HIGH A
POLITICAL STAKE IN MAKING THE MAIHOFFER-BAUM SUCCESSION
WORK.

6. ONE OF BAUM'S PROBLEMS IS THAT HE COMES TO HIS JOB
AS A NOT FULLY FRESH FACE. HE HAS IMSELF BEEN IN THE
MINISTRY AS PARLIAMENTARY STATE SECRETARY FOR 5-1/2
YEARS. DURING THAT TIME, HE HAS DEALT MERELY WITH MEDIA
QUESTIONS, SPORTS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES. THUS, HE
DOES NOT HAVE EXPERIENCE IN THE MAJOR AREAS WHICH FACE
AN INTERIOR MINISTER--E.G., INTERNAL SECURITY, GOVERNMENT
RELATIONS WITH THE POWERFUL CIVIL SERVANTS UNION--AND
WHICH CAUSED MAIHOFFER TO STUMBLE BADLY ON MORE THAN ONE
OCCASION. ON THE OTHER HAND, THOUGH HE LACKS EXPERIENCE
IN THE DIFFICULT AREAS, HE CANNOT ACT AS IF HE WERE
TOTALLY DIVORCED FROM WHAT HAD BEEN GOING ON IN THE
MINISTRY. THEREFORE, HE DOES NOT HAVE THE FULL ADVANTAGE
OF BEING A FRESH FIGURE. NOR HAS HE EVER SHOWN THAT HE
CAN GOVERN A LARGE AND UNWIELDY BUREAUCRACY WITH ITS OWN
MANY LINES TO OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS. WHAT HE NEEDS IS
A PERIOD OF GRACE TO TRY TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF, AND THEN
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SOME EVIDENCE THAT HE CAN ACT WITH DECISIVENESS ON THE
TOUGH QUESTIONS.

7. ABSENT A NEW TERRORIST ATTACK OR SCANDAL INVOLVING
FRG SECURITY FORCES, BAUM HAS A FAIR CHANCE TO EXTEND
HIS GRACE PERIOD THROUGH THE SUMMER BREAK. ON JUNE 8,

HE WILL HAVE TO DEFEND THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN THE BUNDESTAG DEBATE OF THE "HOECHEL REPORT", WHICH COVERS POLICE AND OTHER BLUNDERS IN THE EFFORT TO SAVE HANNS-MARTIN SCHLEYER LAST FALL. AFTER THAT DEBATE, BAUM'S NEXT MAJOR POLITICAL HURDLE WILL PROBABLY BE THE PRESENTATION AND DEFENSE OF HIS MINISTRY'S BUDGET IN THE FALL.

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8. MAIHOFFER'S FATE IS NOT WITHOUT ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY. IT GIVES PAUSE TO ANYONE WHO SUCCEEDS HIM. MAIHOFFER BEGAN AS A LIBERAL PROFESSOR, A CHAMPION OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AGAINST THE STATE. AS MINISTER, HE MOVED
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STEADILY RIGHTWARD TO COUNTER CRITICISM, AND TO MEET OBJECTIVE CHALLENGES TO THE STATE HE TRIED TO DEFEND. IN THE END, HE STOOD WITH FEW FRIENDS IN ANY CAMP. HIS PERSONAL INTEGRITY LARGELY REMAINED, BUT HIS POLITICAL SAVVY AND DECISIVENESS HAD ALL BUT VANISHED. HE WAS A GOOD MAN WHO HAD BEEN UNEQUAL TO, AND HENCE GROUND DOWN BY, HIS JOB.

9. BAUM HAS MORE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, BUT HE STARTS AT A SIMILAR POINT ON THE FDP SCALE AS MAIHOFFER DID IN 1974: CENTER-LEFT. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE INEVITABLE PRESSURES AND PROBLEMS WHICH DESTROYED HIS PREDECESSOR WILL FORCE BAUM IN THE SAME RIGHTWARD DIRECTION, AND HENCE COST HIM THE POLITICAL BASE HE MUST HAVE TO SUCCEED.

10. WE ARE REPORTING SEPARATELY ON THE DEEP TROUBLES THAT FACE THE FDP IN THE WAKE OF LAST SUNDAY'S ELECTION DEFEATS. GENSCHER'S DECISION TO REPLACE MAIHOFFER WITH BAUM WAS CLEARLY AN EFFORT TO DEMONSTRATE HIS CAPACITY TO ACT IN THE WAKE OF ADVERSITY. AS SUCH, IT MAY WELL BE TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE. HOWEVER, THE DECISIVE JUDGMENT WILL NOT BE RENDERED NOW, BUT IN THE OCTOBER STATE ELECTIONS IN BAVARIA AND HESSE.
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